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Family Violence Prevention Division

National
Clearinghouse
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The Assault and Abuse of Middle-Aged and Older Women

by Their Spouses and Children:

An Annotated Bibliography



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**The Assault and Abuse of Middle-Aged
and Older Women
by Their Spouses and Children:
An Annotated Bibliography**

by
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Prepared for the
National Clearinghouse on Family Violence
Family Violence Prevention Division
Social Service Programs Branch
Health and Welfare Canada
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Borkowski, Margaret; Murch, Mervyn and Walker, Val. "Some Social Characteristics of Marital Violence", in Borkowski, Margaret; Murch, Mervyn and Walker, Val. "Marital Violence: The Community Response", New York: Tavistock Publications, pp. 30-40, 1983.

A description of the demographic make-up of various British samples indicates that victims range in age from 16 to over 60. One sample shows that twenty per cent of subjects had been in violent relationships for more than 20 years.

Bowker, Lee H. "The Dimensions of Violent Marriages and Marital Violence", in Bowker, Lee H. "Beating Wife-Beating", Toronto: Lexington Books, pp. 39-62, 1983.

Bowker discusses women's previous experiences with violence, pre-marital episodes of abuse, the characteristics of violent marriages, the nature and extent of violence and the relationship between demographic characteristics and wife assault.

Charles, Andrew V. "Physically Abused Parents", *Journal of Family Violence*, vol. 1(4), pp. 343-355, 1986.

A literature review and study of the topic of non-lethal violence by children against their parents. Findings include:

- 1) Two thirds of the abuse is by males.
- 2) Abuse by females starts at a younger age than males, but does not continue at the same rate as males, and female abusers are more likely to use household objects as weapons.

No conclusions are made as to whether violence against mothers is more prevalent than against fathers. Of the six case studies presented, mothers were the victims in three, fathers in two, and both parents in one.

Chen, Pei N.; Bell, Sharon L.; Dolinsky, Debra L.; Doyle, John; and Dunn, Moira. "Elderly Abuse in Domestic Settings: A Pilot Study", *Clinical Gerontologist*, vol. 4(1), pp. 3-17, 1982.

A pilot study encompassing three areas: (1) interviews with experts; (2) survey to provide a sampling frame and (3) cross-section survey of 90 practitioners with contact or knowledge of victims of elder abuse. A variety of causes, effects and interventions are discussed. Findings are that most victims are women between the ages of 60 and 80. Most abusers are male between the ages of 40 and 60, with a close relationship to the victim, either an adult child, spouse, grandchild, sibling or nephew.

Cohen, Leah. "Small Expectations, Society's Betrayal of Older Women". Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1984.

Through various case histories, the author examines the plight of older women in a sexist/ageist society. Each chapter of this book analyzes a different problem faced by women as they age, one of which deals specifically with violence.

Cookin, Deborah and Dunkle, Ruth E. "Elder Abuse: Issues for the Practitioner", *Social Casework*, vol. 66(1), pp. 3-12, 1985.

This article identifies problems related to working with victims of elder abuse. Attitudes and biases of workers are examined and strategies for overcoming obstacles provided. A section on powerlessness of the client and its effect on intervention deals with a case of wife assault.

Cornell, Claire Pedrick and Gelles, Richard J. "Adolescent to Parent Violence", *Urban Social Change Review*, vol. 15(1), pp. 8-14, 1982.

The purpose of this study was to establish a data base on violence against parents by their adolescent children, using a nationally representative sample of 608 two-parent families with at least one child between the ages of 10-17. It is found that the rates of severe or abusive violence against parents are almost as high as that of wife or child abuse. The typical form that this violence takes is older sons hitting and abusing their mothers. It is interesting to see that severe violence increases with the age of the male child, but decreases as the female child ages. Explanations for why mothers are the preferred victims are:

- 1) Mothers spend more time with their children, therefore the time at risk is greater for them.
- 2) Mothers lack the physical and social resources to retaliate against their violent children.
- 3) Children may learn that their mothers are appropriate targets for abuse because they are already victims of wife assault.
- 4) Sons and daughters are more likely to use severe violence against their mothers if she is a victim of wife abuse, but none of the children from such families ever used violence against their father.

Christ, Karen. "Elder Abuse: Its Relationship to Spouse Abuse". Statement prepared for a Hearing on Elder Abuse by the U.S. House Select Committee on Aging, Boston, Mass., March 23, 1981.

Discusses some of the needs and available resources for wife abuse victims as compared to elder abuse victims. (Deals only with the situation in the U.S.).

Dobash, R. Emerson; Dobash, Russell P.; Cavanagh, Cathy and Wilson, Monica. "Wife Beating: The Victims Speak". *Victimology: An International Journal*, vol. 2(3-4), pp. 608-622, 1978.

Transcripts from three interviews with battered women. One interview is with a woman, aged 40, who spent 20 years in an abusive marriage. During this time she had suffered cuts, bruises, had her teeth knocked out and her hair torn out, weapons had been used against her and she had been set on fire. It is shown that violence increases, in both intensity and severity, as the marriage continues.

Duenas, Maria Teresa. "Impact of Long Term Sexual Abuse", *Clinical Gerontologist*, vol. 4(4), pp. 47-50, 1986.

Discussion of the case of a 64-year-old woman, who had been sexually abused by her older (15 yrs. her senior) brother for more than 30 years. The abuse stopped when she was 42. Effects such as social isolation, severe depression, suicidal tendencies, low self-esteem, guilt and anger are noted.

Hilberman, Elaine and Munson, Kit. "Sixty Battered Women". *Victimology: An International Journal*, vol. 2(3-4), pp. 460-470, 1978.

Focuses on the psychological effects of wife assault on sixty women living in rural areas of the southeastern U.S. Subjects range in age from 19 to 82 and were referred for psychiatric evaluation by the medical staff of a local health clinic. The article describes some background characteristics of both the victim and the perpetrator, types of abuse, effects on the children, psychiatric and physical illnesses suffered by the victims and suggestions for treatment.

Kincaid, Pat J. "The Omitted Reality: Husband-Wife Violence in Ontario and Policy Implications for Education", Concord, Ontario: Belsten Publishing Ltd. 1984.

Using samples from a questionnaire, Ontario courts and shelters, and a popular magazine, the author discusses characteristics of victims and abusers, types of assault/abuse, the cycle of violence, sexism as a causal factor, and the policy implications of family violence as it relates to the educational system in Ontario. It is found that both victims and perpetrators come from many and varied ethnic, economic, educational and age groups. Definitions of violent acts vary also. Further research into the cycle of violence is called for, and sex role socialization was found to be a major causal factor. Of particular interest is the age

range of the victims, from 15 to 72 years, length of relationship ranged from less than one year to 35 years. No women over age 50 were found in the Interval House sample. The greatest predictors of violence are found to be traditional ideology and battering experience, both of which are more intense in middle-aged to older couples.

Gaquin, Deirdre. "Spouse Abuse: Data from the National Crime Survey". *Victimology: An International Journal*, vol. 2 (3-4), pp. 632-643, 1978.

Survey conducted by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, which includes many crimes not previously reported. Findings include:

- 1) Men are at greater risk of being assaulted than are women, but they are at almost no risk of being assaulted by their wives.
- 2) Almost 15% of assaults against women in the U.S. are perpetrated by their husbands or ex-husbands.
- 3) For women the risk of assaults is lower as age increases, however, older married women are still at risk. Spouse abuse as a percentage of all assaults for women aged 45-55 is 23.7%; for women aged 55+ it is 15.7%.
- 4) Wife assault is a repetitious crime, more likely to occur at night and in the victim's home. Victims are more likely to be injured and require more medical attention and hospitalization than victims of other forms of assault.

Gesino, Jack; Smith, Holly Hamlett and Keckich, Walter. "The Battered Woman Grows Old". *Clinical Gerontologist*, vol. 1(1), pp. 59-67, 1982.

Presents two case studies of older women who had been victims of wife assault for many years. Both are patients of a geropsychiatric unit, being treated for depression. It is found that older women remain in abusive relationships for the same reasons as young women: poor self-image, social isolation, belief that the husband will change, shame, fears of retaliation by him and stigmatization by friends and family. It is postulated that the effects of these variables is stronger in older women because of their more traditional socialization. This article shows that some women spend their whole lives in violent relationships.

Morris, Gregory W. "Buddy", in Morris, Gregory W. "The Kids Next Door: Sons and Daughters Who Kill Their Parents", New York: William Morrow and Co., pp. 125-142, 1985.

The true story of a child who, after suffering long-term abuse at the hands of his father, killed his mother.

"For the Love of Money" in Morris, Gregory. "The Kids Next Door: Sons and Daughters Who Kill Their Parents", New York: William Morrow and Co., pp. 252-258, 1985.

Recounts the abuse and arranged murder of a woman by her 32-year-old son.

Pagelow, Mildred Daley. "Victims and Abusers: Some Characteristics", in Pagelow, Mildred Daley "Woman Battering: Victims and Their Experiences". Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, pp. 89-108, 1981.

Using samples from American transition houses and shelters, the author discusses some demographic characteristics of victim and perpetrator, including age, ethnicity and race, and marital status. Of particular interest is an examination of some of the increased problems a victim faces in leaving a violent relationship as she gets older.

"Three Case Histories", in Pagelow, Mildred Daley "Woman Battering: Victims and Their Experiences", Beverly Hills: Sage Publication, pp. 179-208, 1981.

Presents the case histories of three battered women, one had been battered prior to and during both her marriages - a total of 27 years. She was again victimized by watching the same thing happen to her daughter, who was assaulted continuously over a two-year period until her husband succeeded in killing her. Another describes the events surrounding the assault of a woman and her mother by her husband-to-be.

Roy, Maria. "Four Thousand Partners in Violence: A Trend Analysis", in Roy, Maria, "The Abusive Partner: An Analysis of Domestic Battering", Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, pp. 17-35, 1982.


A 4-year study whose sample is comprised of 4000 married (66.2%), companioned (24.5%), divorced/separated/dating (9.3%) women who had been abused. The sample is split into 5 subclasses according to age, with the most victimized age group being those from 26 to 35 years (46%). However, there is a large percentage (30.5%) of abused women over age 35, with a substantial number (8.8%) of victims over age 50. It is also found that 12.9% of relationships had endured for more than 16 years.

SpareRib "Older Women: 'We Live Here'" #96, pp. 32-35, July 1980.

Recounts the development of a feminist collective of older women, who live communally in a city in the Netherlands. Some had left abusive marriages, some were lonely or displaced, others came from institutions. They call their lifestyle "a victory over oppression".

Wolf, Rosalie S. and Pillemer, Karl A. "The Relationship between Organizational Structure and Client Outcome in Three Model Projects on Elderly Abuse", paper presented at the Second National Conference for Family Violence Researchers, August 9, 1984, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire.

Presents a description of model projects in three U.S. cities and aspects of organizational performance. Of interest are the socio-demographic factors relating to victims and perpetrators. Those most at risk for abuse are women over age 75, however a substantial number of women between ages 59 and 64 are also in danger. Approximately one third of victims (male and female) are married. Those most likely to be abusers are males, 50 years and older, with the vast majority living with the victim. Mental illness and alcohol abuse are significant factors for this group.



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